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PROSPECTIVE AGRICULTURE

IN

NEW HAMPSHIRE.

AN ADDRESS BEFORE THE GENERAL MEETING OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE, THE PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY, AND THE STATE AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY, HOLDEN AT MANCHESTER ON THE 3D DAY OF JANUARY, 1883,

BY JOSEPH B. WALKER.

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PROSPECTIVE AGRICULTURE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE.

I have in mind a painting attributed to Poussin, which, in an indifferent light and to hasty observation, affords little but heavy shadows and vague hints of objects distant and uncertain. A good light, however, reveals to the careful observer a picture, as distinct as pleasing, of magnificent trees and green lawns rising by gentle slopes to cultured hills crowned by stately buildings, which look down upon a crystal stream reaching upward and backward into a remote perspective of land and bright sky—a work of high art worthy of its reputed author.

It has occurred to me that this bit of canvas affords a fair illustration of the present condition of our New Hampshire agriculture, which appears in a discouraging state of dull decadence, or hopeful and full of promise, just as one looks at it carelessly and superficially, or sharply and intelligently scans its real condition.

Some people in every considerable community have been born timid, just as some others, their near kindred, have been born tired. Both of these classes, destitute of much enterprise, generally take counsel of their fears, and, regarding temporary shadows as fixed realities, mournfully tell us that New Hampshire farming is fast becoming a thing of the past, whose future is gradually narrowing to extinction. So long and constant has continued that doleful wail, that it has seemed to me it might not be altogether profitless to meet it just here and now by a brief examination of the present condition and prospects of our farming, which will, I am confident, do something to correct unfavorable impressions of the faint-hearted, and to give to those having faith in its future confirmation of their convictions.

Now these are among the prominent facts upon which the sad auguries above alluded to are based:

1. We are told that the last census shows a decline of population in no less than one hundred and twenty of the two hundred and thirty-nine towns and cities of the state; that those towns are all, or almost all, agricultural towns; that many farms once occupied by prosperous families are now abandoned, and that their buildings are fast sinking into ruin; and that school-houses once crowded with scholars are now well-nigh empty, so that in the near future that sweetest of all New Hampshire products, the school-mistress, will be little needed but for export.

2. We are also told that in these and other farming towns of moderate size the people have not only declined in numbers, but in character as well, and that their leading men, their foremost representatives abroad, in the legislature, and upon juries, as well as those prominent in religious or civil councils and offices of public trust at home, compare unfavorably with those of the corresponding class forty years ago.

3. We are further told that our forests are being cut off at a fearful rate, and that unless there come a speedy check of this rapid denudation the heavy timber lands of the state will soon exist only in history, that our climate will become more severe, that droughts will become more frequent, and that our water-power will be seriously diminished.

4. It is also sadly suggested that we are importing about all the wheat we consume, and very much of the corn, as well as considerable quantities of other farm products, all of which we ought to raise ourselves. And it is further urged, that the number of cattle and sheep has declined, and that the hay upon which these are mainly subsisted was less in 1880 than in 1870.

5. It is declared that the coming generation to which our agriculture must be intrusted, have but little love for the business, and are largely leaving the state in search of occupations more attractive elsewhere.

6. It is also most emphatically said that our soil is a poor one, and that farming, whatever it may have been formerly, is no longer a profitable business.

These are among the strongest assertions made by those who, honestly I have no doubt, speak despondingly and disparagingly

of our occupation. Their faint-heartedness may be useful, but exactly how it is not easy to see. I honor their cautious warnings, and manifest for their opinions no disrespect; but I cannot help recalling the story of that near kinsman of theirs in one of the first colonies which emigrated from England to Australia, who, long before landing, was continually boring his associates with lugubrious anticipations of imagined sickness, despair, and death, and by repeated declarations of his determination to go back by the first opportunity. "We can never consent to that," said they, in reply. "You are the most important man in our whole company. We are all depending upon having your corpse to start our new graveyard with." Every commodity, however useless it may seem, is good for something; and doubtless these hoarse-voiced croakers have been created for some mysterious good.

But let us examine a little the several allegations I have just recited. We will look at them, if you please, in the order I have presented them.

1. In regard to the decrease of population* in the agricultural towns, it may be remarked that it will be found upon examination

*The following table shows the population of the several counties of New Hampshire for the years 1880 and 1870, together with the number of towns in each which have increased in population and those which have lost during the decade of 1870-1880.

Counties.	Pop.—1880.	Pop.—1870.	No. towns which have gained.	No. towns which have lost.
Belknap.....	17,948	17,681	5	6
Carroll.....	18,222	17,332	7	11
Cheshire.....	28,734	27,265	13	9
Coös.....	18,580	14,932	24	4
Grafton.....	38,790	39,103	14	24
Hillsborough.....	75,633	64,238	10	20
Merrimack.....	46,300	42,151	11	15
Rockingham.....	49,062	47,297	25	13
Strafford.....	35,559	30,243	5	8
Sullivan.....	18,161	18,058	5	10
	346,989	318,300	119	120

Every county in the state except Grafton has made a gain during the last decade, and that has lost but 313.

J. B. W.

that New Hampshire has already passed the most discouraging period of this decline. While it is true that one hundred and twenty towns lessened their population in the last decade, it is equally true that one hundred and eighty-four did the same thing during the previous one, and that the last census shows that sixty-four have passed from a declining to an upward grade. While abandoned farms may be still found in some sections of our state, it will generally appear to the careful inquirer that their transfer to the pasturage and forest areas has been wise, and that their net productiveness will be enhanced by the change. They have not, as some seem to suppose, been removed from the state's domain.

Notwithstanding this loss of population in some of our agricultural towns there has been a considerable gain in others, while in those where mechanical and manufacturing interests are prominent the number of people has decidedly increased, raising the general gain for the whole state during this period to nine per cent. Indeed, very much of the loss above mentioned is apparent only, being a mere transfer of population from localities less favored to others more desirable, and a part of the great movement for good now in progress throughout New England.

2. While it is true that in some of our agricultural districts we now miss excellent persons whose presence was of great importance, and whose absence reduces somewhat the general standard of intelligence and enterprise, the great moulding agencies, which have done so much to make them what they were, still remain to continue the same benign influences upon the coming generations which they have exerted upon those of the past.

3. As to the removal of our forests, it may be truly said that this work has been going on ever since the red man surrendered them to our fathers, and in a proper way should go on perpetually. We have much rough land which is better adapted to the production of wood and timber than of anything else,—indeed, is unfit for anything else. Properly managed, this will yield a good crop once in a generation. When that crop has matured it should be removed and give place to another, just as one of corn or grass or any other farm product should be harvested when ripe.

But the forest area is not being sensibly lessened. The sections where the most extensive denudation is in progress are very

largely those covered with primeval woods, which attained their maturity generations ago and have not been improving since. Besides, in these sections the denudation is but partial, the smaller trees being left uncut.

It is doubtless true that the removal of the thick coverings which originally sheltered from the sun's rays all parts of our state's surface has reduced the volumes of its streams, and increased somewhat the aridity of its summers, but not to any serious degree; while the value of the growths removed has outweighed by far all losses thus incurred. In most instances the areas cut over have been left to produce new forests, and the increased evaporation incident to the substitution of these for their predecessors is already partially compensated by a wise retention in natural reservoirs of large quantities of the waters formerly running to waste.

4. It is true that we import most of the wheat we consume, and equally so that we must do so or go without it. New Hampshire is but poorly adapted to the production of this crop, and can profitably raise but a trifling part of what we need. If the hay crop of 1879 was a little less than that of 1869, I can only say that it might easily have been double. But it was less by only three and a quarter per cent, owing probably to the dry summer of the year in which the last census was taken. We have, however, increased our corn crop about six per cent., and learned to raise it for about half of what it formerly cost us. In 1879 the cash value per acre of the corn raised in New Hampshire was twenty-seven dollars and seventy-four cents, and exceeded that of any other state of the republic, while but three of the whole number showed a greater yield per acre. If, during the last decade, we have diminished somewhat the number of our working oxen, we have in the same period increased the number of horses, which are largely taking their places, twenty per cent. Our milch cows are as numerous as they were ten years ago, and of far better quality, while our other cattle have increased in number twenty-three per cent., and also gained in excellence.

5. We can hardly reproach our young people for going elsewhere when their true interest requires their removal. An old state like ours, which possesses only about two millions and a third of acres of improved land, can no more retain at home the

whole increase of its population than could one of those old farmsteads, which now, alas! exist only in history, its baker's dozen of sturdy children when they came to mature years. But the better and therefore more profitable and attractive farming now appearing among us will largely correct this evil, so far as it is an evil, and render it a temporary one.

6. The objection that our soils are worn, and naturally inferior to those of the West and South, has weight in it; but we must not forget that their nearness to ultimate markets compensates largely for their inferiority of quality when compared with richer lands one or two thousand miles away, inasmuch as fertilization is cheaper than long transportation. Location is as important a factor in determining the value of farm land as quality of soil, and if, as Joseph Cook said last Thursday night at Concord, New England is to become one great hive packed full of busy mechanics and manufacturers, even more important,—for all these are eaters and not raisers of farm products, and the fields nearest to them are nearest to ultimate markets. The New Hampshire farmer, therefore, more even than now, will in the future be able to trade hand to hand with the consumer, and not be compelled, like his brother upon the prairie, to cross a continent and an ocean to find him.

I think I have fairly considered these objections so often urged against a hopeful view of our agricultural future, and accorded them due weight. The shadows upon the picture are not as dense as a careless glance would lead one to believe. But we will turn from these to some of its lighter hues.

It will be found upon examination that these occupy by far the larger portion of the canvas. In fact, great underlying forces, constantly active, are gradually lifting our agriculture out of the chaos of this transitionary period through which it is now passing, just as in the dim geologic past great physical energies raised our whole territory above the gloom of universal water. The decadence lamented is not in fact a decadence, but a gradual rise through natural changes for the better.

1. Prominent among these great uplifting forces are certain intellectual agencies now fully organized and active. At their head stands the Agricultural college, fairly endowed, and ably

equipped with a corps of efficient professors and a farm of three hundred and sixty acres for experimentation. It has been in successful operation for about fifteen years, and has had upon its rolls the names of one hundred and seventy-three young men, seventy-three of whom have taken the full course of study and graduated. Of these graduates about two fifths are now farmers. I here submit to your candid judgment if the course of study pursued at this institution is not an ample one, and if those who master it are not entitled to the appellation of "well-educated men." It embraces English and American literature, elocution, rhetoric, laws of business, political economy, constitutional and international law, Grecian, Roman, and modern history, drawing, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, surveying, construction of roads and bridges, physics, astronomy, chemistry, physiology, zoölogy, botany, geology, mineralogy, insects injurious to vegetation, fruit culture, drainage, irrigation, forestry, stock breeding, dairying, and general farm management. If with good health and such a scientific equipment a young man cannot gain a respectable living, he ought never to have been born.

The doors of this college are open to any New Hampshire boy who wishes to enter, and some one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars a year will meet his ordinary expenses, a portion of which sum he may earn, if so disposed, upon the college farm or elsewhere in the vicinity. Besides the knowledge there acquired by the farmer's son, the social attrition with his equals, which he cannot there avoid, will be to him of inestimable value in after life.

2. The Board of Agriculture, which came into existence about a dozen years ago, has done much by lectures and discussions to impart information and awaken increased interest in husbandry. I feel some delicacy in commending its work as I would like to do on this occasion, on account of the modesty of some of its members here present, and from a fear that I may suffuse with a blush the thin, pale face of its secretary; but I feel constrained to say that they have done much not only to impart valuable information, but to arouse to new life many of our sleepest farmers, who, going nowhere from home but to mill and to meeting,—to the latter, alas! but too seldom,—had sunk into deep agricultural apathy, and got to believe that progress and agricultural science were

humbugs. If any old farmer from a cross road takes offence at this plain remark, I would assure him that I have uttered it simply as a personal confession of my own, and that I did not mean him at all! It will turn out, however, that the board will get round to *him*, by and by.

This Board of Agriculture has held meetings in almost every town in the state, at the rate of some thirty or more a year. These have usually been continued to two or three sessions, and in some instances for as many days. Addresses upon the leading agricultural topics have been given, followed by discussions of the subject under consideration by all who cared to join therein. These, carefully reported by the secretary, and supplemented by papers of a kindred nature obtained elsewhere, have been annually gathered into a volume and distributed throughout the state. Ten such volumes have been already published, and the eleventh is now in press. This agency, so simple in its organization and so largely gratuitous, has done a good work for us New Hampshire farmers.

3. But still another, of kindred if not of altogether similar aims, has more recently come into being, and is doing efficient work for us and our calling. I refer to that of the Patrons of Husbandry. I speak of it with reserve, as I can speak only as an outsider; but much of its work is apparent to everybody, and commands general approbation. It recognizes in a broad way a great truth, which most of us who call ourselves Christians, and are not pagans, recognize in a way more limited, viz., that woman is an important factor in social life, and that the limits of the church and the household alone should not circumscribe her sphere. It has been keen to see that our agricultural communities need social stimulus, and has inaugurated various means to afford it. It has done more to bring scattered people together into friendly association with one another than any previous agricultural agency. Judging from the papers contributed by its members to the volumes of the Board of Agriculture, it is everywhere and constantly alive to all efforts for the dissemination of useful knowledge among its members and to the elevation of our calling to a higher plane than any it has moved upon heretofore.

These three organizations,—the Agricultural College, the Board of Agriculture, and the Grange,—are intellectual agencies, and

from them we ought to learn some good farming. I am just here reminded of the indignant remark of the Connecticut comb-maker, who, just before the Rebellion, was trading largely with the South, and all the while ventilating with great freedom his abolition ideas. A friend suggested to him that if he talked so loud the South might refuse to buy his combs. "Not buy my combs!" exclaimed he in great anger,—“Not buy my combs! If they won't buy my combs, let them go lousy!” If we as farmers cannot profit by the instructions of these three efficient educators in agriculture, we ought to go hungry, for it is the only reasonable thing we can do but die.

There are still others in full tide of activity in our behalf, which are but partially intellectual. They have in view the same general end, but are laboring on a different line to attain it. I allude to the state, county, and town agricultural societies, with all of which you are familiar. Besides affording an occasional holiday to us who have too few of them, they place on exhibition the choicest products of the field, the stall, and the dairy. Their teaching is object-teaching. They awaken emulation. They raise our standards of excellence, and confirm our belief in higher possibilities. They assert and prove what may be done by what has been done. They teach by sight and not by faith, and furnish new ideas to many who will accept them from no other source. They afford, in short, the same kind of preaching in farming that honest living does in religion.

4. Others still there are, and different, which are doing much to further the interests of good agriculture, and to which I am tempted to give more time than I can afford. I allude to the public farms of the state and of the counties. There are thirteen of these—three of the former and ten of the latter. Scattered throughout the commonwealth, from Coös to Massachusetts line, they are all useful teachers in their several localities, and a power for agricultural good.

They are larger, better equipped with buildings, machinery, and labor than the average private farm. Although of recent establishment, they have accomplished improvements in stock-raising, dairying, soil culture, and general farm management which their neighbors have not generally attained. The experiments in feeding animals made during the last few years upon the col-

lege farm afford more facts in relation to the relative values of different kinds and amounts of foods than all the recorded experiments in that direction by our farmers during the last hundred years. Equipped with a little elementary knowledge of the subject to start with, the practical farmer can learn more in a single day at the asylum farm in regard to the making of milk, and the saving, manipulation, and dissemination of manures, than a month's mere reading can give him.

I had occasion the last autumn to visit each of the county farms; and, although the observations I made of their agriculture was incidental only to the main purpose of my several visits, I was strongly impressed with the value of these farms as agricultural educators in their several localities. They vary much in size, being from some two hundred and fifty to five hundred acres each, each of them having a good share of tillage land of excellent quality, and supplied with good buildings and generally with an abundance of pure water. All of them have been greatly improved since becoming public property, and now rank among the best farms in the state. Rough fields have been cleared of rocks and made smooth; straggling walls and fences have been brought into line and put in good condition; hungry soils have been fed and made fat; herds of good cattle have been reared; systematic courses of husbandry have been adopted; good returns have been received; and the much-abused county commissioners and farm superintendents have done good work as successful educators in husbandry, of which they seem altogether unconscious. And this success comes largely from the public requirement that these farms be made productive, and that those in charge of them shall make annual printed reports of their operations to the people of their respective counties. These reports are to the officers in charge what rent-day is to the English tenant farmer,—a kind of wholesome expectancy which cannot be dodged, profitable to landlord and tenant both. Indeed, if a noose could be put around the nozzles of our despondent farmers who cannot make farming pay, and they be annually forced to make full reports of their indolent failures, thousands of them would be shamed into better and more profitable farming than they had ever before deemed possible.

As a specimen of the crops raised on these county farms, I

would cite those produced upon one of moderate size, that of Cheshire county, as given in the Commissioners' Report of 1881, and valued at five thousand two hundred sixty-seven dollars and forty-four cents, or fifteen dollars and thirty-one cents per acre.

As an instance of the increased productiveness of one of the state farms, I will say that the crops of the asylum farm in 1843 amounted to five hundred and sixty-one dollars and sixty-seven cents, and in 1881 to eight thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven dollars and thirty-seven cents, or about eighty-eight dollars per acre.

I have made particular allusions to these farms as elevators of the general farming of the state, inasmuch as they seem seldom if ever to have been recognized as such. If they yielded not one single picayune of profit, they would amply repay the trouble and cost of their maintenance as public exhibitions of good farming.

5. The so-called gentleman farmers upon whom so much harmless contempt has been lavished, and the special farmers, are quietly doing much, at different points, for their own benefit and for the promotion of its agriculture. I could present you to a farmer on Connecticut river, who has introduced into dairying the same enterprise and system which had been previously instrumental in securing to him a competent fortune in a large city, and who gets double prices for all the butter he can make, and two prices for the large amounts of choice pork which is raised as a secondary product of his dairy.

In answer to the question recently put to a neighbor of mine, who, in addition to his ordinary work, is managing a milk farm, Can you give me the exact cost per quart of the milk you are now selling? he immediately took from a nail near his desk a file of daily reports of the feed and returns of each one of his herd of cows, and read to me the exact cost of the keeping of individual cows the day before, and the amount of milk in pounds and ounces which each gave him. A minute's study of the report of any day gave the profit or loss of the whole herd, or of any particular animal. I cite these simply as instances of what is being done all over the state, and, happily, these ways of thrift are contagious.

6. A strong encouragement to a better agriculture among us is found in the multiplication and improvement of our local markets,

at which ultimate prices may be realized for farm products. Forty years ago we sold a few cattle to drovers, and bartered our remaining farm surplus with the village trader upon such terms as he was willing to accord. We saw very little money, and a silver dollar looked as large as a cart wheel. The great markets of that time were the distant coast towns. Thither the trader just mentioned sent what little we had to sell, and returned us its equivalent in family supplies. We sold cheap and bought dear. He became rich, and we remained poor.

Things are different now. Think of the improvement of our home markets. What markets had the farmers of this valley, for instance, fifty years ago? Lawrence was not, Lowell was not, Nashua was not, Manchester was not, Concord was but a little country village, Fisherville and Franklin were not. The sites of all these important towns were marked only by the rocky descents down which the Merrimack hastened with accelerated current its idle waters to the sea. And while these large trunk towns have been girding on their armor for the great industrial contest whose skirmish line they have as yet hardly passed, others, still younger, have been springing into life on the affluents of our main stream, and afford us increased assurance that the time is near when every farmer may, if he choose, be not only the producer, but the transporter and salesman, of whatever he has to sell in good markets, and at highest prices. While, without such, agricultural prosperity is impossible, we may now congratulate ourselves that these are assuredly ours.

7. Besides the calls of the manufacturing towns, just reflect for a moment upon the demand made upon our farmers by the swarms of summer visitors which the great cities are sending us in increased numbers every year. So far we have raised but a part of what these wanted to eat. Their landlords have been obliged to draw upon the prairies and other sections outside our own limits for requisite supplies. This peaceful horde, which we welcome with open arms, which eats much and raises nothing, has become so enamored of our hills and mountains, and lakes and streams, and pure air and bright skies, that they will be sure to come hereafter in increased numbers, so that in the near future many of our old villages will be rejuvenated, and scores of our seaside and hilly districts will be as numerously adorned with

hotel palaces and boarding-houses as were once the high places of Italy with the castles and villas of the citizens of imperial Rome.

8. One important result of this growth of cities and large towns is the advent of the market-gardener among us, who has brought with him an intenser and more profitable agriculture than any we have heretofore seen. He is demonstrating that liberal fertilization and thorough pulverization will put money in the farmer's pocket. Instead of sending to Boston for their early vegetables, as a few years ago most of the Concord people were wont to do, they now buy them of local gardeners. A single one of these, farming about seventy acres, annually gathers therefrom a crop worth more than ten thousand dollars, and is making money. What is true of this type of farming at Concord is doubtless true to a greater or less extent of similar farming around all our populous centres.

9. The milk farmer has also put in his appearance. Our large towns all require large daily supplies of new milk. At the same time modern facilities of transportation render its export profitable. A month or two since, when at Wilton, I found myself in the midst of an extensive milk region, the products of which went daily to Boston. Week before last I was landed upon the platform of the Rollinsford railway station to face a shining army of milk cans. Within a few days I have been told that a Boston milk line has been extended into the valley of the Suncook. Instances like these indicate the advent of a new interest among us which had here no existence twenty years ago.

10. Akin to milk farming is another specialty of more recent introduction—the rearing of choice blooded stock for the home market and for exportation. Persons familiar with our old cattle-shows will remember that the stock there exhibited was all native stock. Not one farmer in a thousand had ever seen a herd-book, and very few could distinguish a Devon from a Durham animal. We had inherited scrub stock from our fathers, and were content with it. But it is not so now. Pedigrees are studied. Strains of blood are carefully traced. The characteristics of different breeds are exhaustively investigated. The minutest points are noted. Good animals are in demand at good prices. Keeping step to the music of this change, the stock breeder has quietly walked in, and

is raising as fine specimens of thoroughbred cattle as can be found anywhere. From a single farm, distant from this spot only about twenty miles, have been sold in a single year thoroughbred Jerseys to the amount of nearly fourteen thousand dollars (\$13,868), not all indeed raised upon this one farm, but mostly upon this and several others associated with it, and under the same control. When a calf three months old will bring a hundred dollars, and a cow may be sold for eight hundred, it is too late to take counsel of our indolence, and say in the hearing of live men that farming cannot be made to pay.

But I need no further recite the numerous elevating forces now operating upon our agriculture,—the educational efforts of the Agricultural College, the Board of Agriculture, and the Grange; the exhibitions of the best specimens of everything in our line by the state, county, and town societies; the object-teaching of good farming upon our state and county farms; the stimulus of good markets, increasing in numbers and importance every year; and the examples of successful special farmers who are now making free use of system, skill, capital, and enterprise. All these are elevating forces continually at work, gradually, to be sure, but effectively, as the census returns abundantly prove. But these alone will never accomplish the full measure of what we all desire. General and united effort is indispensable.

When at Chicago, a few years since, my attention was called to a stately brick block at the corner of two important business streets, which had been recently raised some half a dozen feet above the level upon which it formerly stood. Excavations under its foundations had been made, and some fifteen hundred jack-screws set therein, manned by a score or two of men. At the command of the superintendent of the works, a section of these were each turned half way round, and then those of the next section, and afterwards of the next, and so on until every screw had made its half circuit. This movement was patiently repeated over and over again. Meanwhile the street throngs went by and observed no change in the structure's elevation until days had passed, when its rise became apparent to all, even the most careless. At the week's end that ponderous building hung suspended in mid-air, like an immense balloon about to rise from its moor-

ings. The patient shoulders of fifteen hundred sturdy little jack-screws had raised it to its appointed elevation. So the united lift of fifty thousand resolute farmers, supplementing the agencies before named, will eventually place New Hampshire farming upon the high plane awaiting it. Without this it can never achieve its high destiny, and this it is sure ere long to have.

In forecasting the prospective agriculture of New Hampshire, I think it reasonable to expect that at a period less distant in the future than the settlement of Strawberry Bank is in the past we shall have quadrupled our population; that our soil will have been quadrupled in productiveness; that our forests will be systematically managed, and a source of regular income; that our water-power will be carefully husbanded, and every idle brook made industrious; that five million visitors will spend portions of every year with us; that our hay crop will have reached two millions of tons, and our corn crop five million bushels; that our stock and dairy husbandry will be proportionately enlarged; that the average farmer will be as well informed and as well to do as his average brother in the other industrial callings; and that enough only of shadow will remain upon the picture to display to greatest advantage its most attractive features.

